

Exploring the potential of the Relational Responding Task (RRT) as a new approach to measuring the social meaning of language variation

For decades, quantitative language attitude research has known little methodological innovation (Rosseel et al., forthcoming). Yet, in the last few years, linguists have started to overcome this deadlock and have turned towards social psychology for new attitude measures. Especially the Implicit Association Test (IAT) has proven a successful new addition to the sociolinguist's toolbox (e.g. Pantos & Perkins 2012; Campbell-Kibler, 2012). Despite its relative success, the IAT has a number of limitations, such as the fact that it measures the association between two concepts (e.g. 'I' and 'skinny') without controlling for the relationship between those two concepts (e.g. 'I am skinny' vs. 'I want to be skinny'). The Relational Responding Task (RRT), a novel implicit attitude measure recently developed by social psychologists (De Houwer et al. 2015), makes up for exactly that limitation by presenting participants with full propositions expressing beliefs rather than loose concepts as is the case in the IAT.

In this paper, we present a study that explores the RRT as a novel measure of language attitudes. We employ the novel implicit method alongside a traditional direct rating task to investigate the social meaning of two varieties of Dutch: Standard Belgian Dutch (SBD) and colloquial Belgian Dutch (CBD). In total, 391 native speakers of Belgian Dutch participated in the experiment. Our results show that CBD is associated with dynamism. This means that participants perceive speakers of CBD as sounding trendy and entertaining. Speakers of SBD, by contrast, are not linked to dynamism, but are perceived as sounding prestigious (e.g. intelligent, serious). These results were found both on the implicit level (i.e. in the RRT results), and on the explicit level (i.e. in the rating task results). In addition to presenting the results of our study, this paper will reflect upon the usefulness of the RRT as a new measure for sociolinguists to study social meaning of language variation.

References:

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